We Are All Fragile
The Very Rev. David J. Marshall, All Angels 10.4.26

Exodus 20:1-4, 7-9, 12-20
Psalm 19
Philippians 3:4b-14
Matthew 21:33-46

I was being trained on how to help combat veterans suffering from PTSD. The psychiatrist told us this: *Remember, these men and women are fragile. They look like hardened soldiers, because they are, but inside they are fragile*.
When we had our weekly all-chaplain meeting, our director – who was sitting in on our training (first of its kind in the country) – said this: Combat veterans are fragile; yes, remember though, everyone is fragile. Everyone.

After college, I became a fan of Zig Ziglar who was an author helping people like me in business to business sales. He was not a hard-sales closer guy but rather talked about the importance of customer service in sales. One of his phrases is this: Treat all your customers as if they are hurting; if you do, you will treat most of them the correct way. In other words, treat your customers as if they are fragile; because they are. Another thing he said is that the customers who are the most vocal (loud) are the most fragile – treat them that way and you'll make a long-term customer.

But this is not how society tells us we are to act. We're supposed to put on an air invincibility. We like teams that are undefeated. But that's not how God sees us. In the third chapter of the first book of the Bible, Genesis, God says we are dust and dust we will return. Isaiah compares humans with grass and the flowers of the field. James the Apostle, in his letter, writes that we are like mist. In other words, we are all fragile. And, it's more than just our bodies – which look nothing like flowers or grass or mist. I think the Bible is pointing to our psyche. That's the fragile part. It's the part that is damaged with PTSD. It's the loud side of someone who is angry and shows just how fragile they are by how boisterous they become.

Think of it this way, when you move and box everything up, do you label some as "fragile". If so, you'll place those boxes on the tops of others, you'll treat them differently. And, that's how God sees us and invites us to treat one another in the same way.

St. Peter writes: You have been born a new not of perishable but of imperishable seed through the living and enduring word of God. For all flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flowers of the field. The grass withers. The flower falls, but the word of the Lord endures forever.

We are fragile but the imperishable seed of faith inside of us is resilient and invincible.

The word of the Lord is invincible. The word of the Lord is what gives us hope, gives us promise, gives us protection, and allows us to be fragile in an increasingly angry and polarizing world. It allows us to be the mist, to be the flower in a world that is so bent on keeping us separate and to demean one another. That in this world, we have this beautiful spirit of God, the

word that is running through us, this gift that has given to us. We didn't ask for it. It was given to us by God that we have this beautiful being inside of us. And so my question then is first, how are you treating yourself? Are you treating yourself like you're fragile? Are you treating yourself kindly?

Here's my last thought: The thing about being fragile, the thing about being grass, the thing about being a flower of the field is that we do not have the intellectual capability to understand our own sufferings or why others suffer. One of the things in *mist* that we must let go of is to try to rationalize or explain suffering.

I cannot understand or rationalize the Holocaust. It's beyond my understanding because I'm like the grass of field. I've come to the conclusion that it's impossible along theological lines to understand suffering in that way. But, I have spoken to a survivor of one of the camps. I saw the tattoo on her arm. I have seen her invincible spirit. She has faith and has let go of what she cannot comprehend. What she taught me, and the large group she was speaking to, is that inside of us is an invincible powerful spirit that will take us through times of suffering that will lead us to a better place. That through our suffering we actually can create flowers. That through our suffering we can grow like grass in the field. And that through our suffering we then learn that others are just as fragile as we are. And through that we then with compassion can listen to each other without judgment. That we can hold each other in sorrow. And that we can also hold onto faith believing that God will see us through everything we go through.

So for suffering, for the flowers of the field, for the mist, let us hold fast to that faith, that seed that is planted in us, that is bringing about new life and joy. And may we remember to look at each other and remember that we are all fragile.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.